

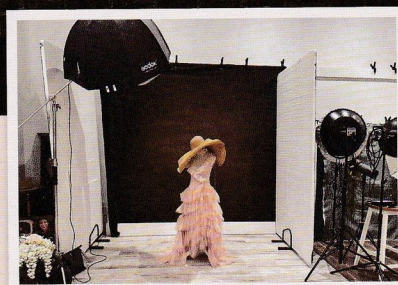
RESIDENT / COVER STORY

"Work hard. Be kind. Leave the world better than you found it."



the Wells family

RESTORING A LEGACY
ON MAIN STREET



BY SARAINA WHITNEY

PHOTOS BY TONYA WELLS | POETIC GRACE & CO. PHOTOGRAPHY

The Wells family lives in the heart of downtown Fairbury, above a spot where a building once stood condemned and moldering. Shawn and Tonya's story together started in high school, where they met on Tonya's sixteenth birthday in 1990. Both from Livingston County, they sparked a lasting connection and married on October 12, 1996, at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Bloomington. From that moment on, they've devoted their lives to hard work, big dreams, and an unbreakable commitment to family.



CAREERS DRIVEN BY PASSION

Shawn works as General Superintendent for Otto Baum Company's restoration division in Morton, a role that speaks perfectly to his many talents. Resourceful and incredibly skilled, he has a love for seeing old things made new again. His vision is for a thriving downtown Fairbury where history, commerce, and community can all coexist beautifully.

An intrepid entrepreneur, Tonya brings her own creative fire to the family through Poetic Grace & Co., a luxury boutique portrait studio, empowering women of all ages to embrace their authentic selves through a guided portrait session that celebrates who they are.

She also operates *Wells on Main Guesthouse and Gatherings*, an elegant event venue and Airbnb destination located in downtown Fairbury. The space is ideal for intimate weddings, bridal showers, baby showers, engagement celebrations, birthday and anniversary parties, and so much more. With a beautifully appointed bridal suite, a stylish groom's suite, and two thoughtfully designed Airbnb rentals, *Wells on Main* offers a one-of-a-kind experience where charm, comfort, and community come together.

- For Tonya, these businesses are not just work—they're heartfelt extensions of who she is: someone who believes

in the power of connection, beauty, and making others feel seen and celebrated. She also enjoys helping in the community through Rotary when she can.

THE TALE BEHIND "WELLS ON MAIN"

Looking at the ivy-covered stone facade and lush storybook details of Wells on Main, no one would guess that it had been a condemned building. It was once home to the historic Dr. Langstaff Clinic, but after the clinic closed, it sat vacant for over 20 years. By the time the Wells family took ownership, the walls were crumbling. But armed with tools, grit, and a vision, they rolled up their sleeves and got to work, pouring their hearts into restoring not just the building, but a piece of Fairbury's story.

Working full-time jobs all the while, they labored three years over the building. Their children, Cassidy (27) and Ethan (26), were instrumental in the process. Seventeen years old when the work started, Ethan was there nearly every day after school and on weekends, helping shoulder the work. Cassidy, always full of spirit and support, jumped in wherever she could.

They had finally reached the point where they could open the doors—after years of late nights, scraped knuckles, and tireless determination. But just as momentum was building, the world came to a sudden halt. In March of 2020, the pandemic arrived



and everything paused. But despite countless setbacks, the Wells kept pushing forward.

Today, out of eight million listings, *Wells on Main* ranks in the top 1% of the most loved homes on Airbnb—a recognition made possible by the kind-hearted guests who took the time to share their experiences through their lovely reviews. It's not just a milestone for their business, but a milestone for the community as well and a reflection of the warmth, hospitality, and resilience that this family has poured into every square inch of their dream.

ONLY THE START OF THE JOURNEY

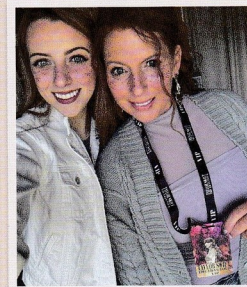
Though much has been accomplished, the Wells family's restoration journey is far from over. Since opening their first Airbnb and event venue in early 2020, they've continued to pour their energy into expanding the vision. They completed Tonya's photography studio in 2021, Poetic Grace & Co., as well as *The Distinguished Gentlemen's Suite* in 2023—a refined space for grooms and their parties. They've also finished a second Airbnb rental in 2024 on the lower level and added a small gym for guests. Currently, they're hard at work on a one-of-a-kind speakeasy-style lounge, which they hope to open within the next year and future plans for a 3rd Airbnb. Every new space they complete brings them one step closer to fully realizing their dream of revitalizing this historic building and creating something truly special for the community.

HEARTFELT RELATIONSHIPS

The memories made during the rebuilding of *Wells on Main* bound their family together in lasting ways. Shawn and Tonya are still best friends with their two children, Cassidy and Ethan, who grew up sharing their parents' values of hard work and responsibility. Today, Cassidy works for a credit union in Upland, Indiana, where she



8 NEIGHBORS OF LIVINGSTON COUNTY



lives with her boyfriend Brad and her beloved dog, Kai. She and her mom share a mutual love of Taylor Swift. Last November they got to experience the Eras Tour, creating unforgettable memories.

Meanwhile, Ethan is busy with September wedding plans, his recent engagement ushering in an exciting chapter of his life. He works in the wind industry and enjoys biking, kayaking, and exploring the great outdoors in his downtime. He and Cassidy remain close, staying updated and involved in each other's lives.

Rounding out the family is their beloved German Shepherd, The Great Gatsby—the mascot of *Wells on Main*. At 132 pounds, he may look intimidating, but he's a gentle giant with a heart full of affection and a soft spot for anyone willing to give him a scratch behind the ears.

A LASTING LEGACY

The Wells family motto is simple but powerful: "Work hard. Be kind. Leave the world better than you found it."

They've traveled the world—across Europe, Canada, the Caribbean, and beyond—but their greatest adventure has been right here, turning dust into dreams and bricks into beauty. Their love for their community has touched countless lives around them and continues to be a beautiful piece in Fairbury's story.

A MESSAGE TO OUR COMMUNITY

"We are so proud to call Fairbury home. This is a town full of heart, history, and hope. We believe in building something lasting here—for ourselves and for future generations. Thank you for being part of that journey with us."